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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: Review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups

Statement submitted by International Federation on Ageing and Soroptimist International, non-governmental organizations in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council; International Council of Jewish Women and International Humanist and Ethical Union, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Council; Armenian International Women's Association and Loretto Community (Sisters of Loretto), non-governmental organizations on the Roster of the Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Older persons and the new millennium

In 1982, Member States of the United Nations met in Vienna for the World Assembly on Ageing, from which emerged the International Plan of Action on Ageing (resolution 37/51), which listed 14 principles and 62 recommendations for action. We applaud the United Nations and Governments around the world for the farsightedness demonstrated by this action, which created the first international document on ageing to guide the formulation of policies and programmes for older persons around the world.

Also, we appreciate the actions of the General Assembly in its adoption of the United Nations Principles of Older Persons, during its forty-sixth session, and its approval of the Global Targets on Ageing for the Year 2001, during its forty-seventh session. We are also encouraged by the inclusion of references or sections on older persons in the documents of the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit for Social Development, the Fourth World Conference on Women, and the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements.

We commend Member States for resolving to convene a second World Assembly on Ageing, in 2002, to be devoted to an overall review of the outcome of the First World Assembly and to the adoption of a revised plan of action and a long-term strategy on ageing. We also recognize that during the nearly 20 years since the adoption of the first Plan of Action, some progress has been made towards following the principles and achieving the action items of the Plan. However, the world economic and social situations have changed significantly, and population ageing has emerged as a major issue for all countries, both developed and developing.

The International Federation on Ageing, with the support of the NGO Committee on Ageing, representing more than 50 non-governmental organizations, views the second World Assembly as an unparalleled occasion for Governments and civil society to continue to identify ways to meet the basic needs of older persons. It is also essential to recognize these individuals as a valuable resource in their communities and in society, valuing the human potential of older men and women and the wealth of human capital they represent. To achieve these goals, we propose that delegates to the second World Assembly on Ageing consider the following objectives and action items.

Recommendations for Action

1. The 1999 International Year of Older Persons gave the world a meaningful theme, "Towards a society for all ages". Additionally, the Year was built around a four-part conceptual framework: (a) the situation of older persons — health, housing, family, income security and employment; (b) lifelong individual development — recognizing change and the need for adaptive life skills; (c) multigenerational relationships — acknowledging social, economic and cultural revolutions affecting societies; and (d) development — outlining the challenge to reconciling population ageing and continued socio-economic development. We strongly urge that the formulation of a plan of action on ageing for the new millennium reflect both this theme and the four elements of the conceptual framework. Together, they provide a strong, clearly stated basis on which to build a plan of action for developing and implementing policies and programmes addressed to older persons.

2. Reflecting on the 1982 Plan of Action, we find that many of the recommendations still remain important items for action — for example: social protection, including income security and employment; housing and the environment; health and nutrition; the family; and education. However, new and important areas of concern have emerged, including removing age barriers that exclude older persons from literacy, education, and income-generating programmes; the developing of programmes to educate society about the need for human rights for older persons; the inclusion of older persons at all levels of planning and implementation of development programmes; providing legal, financial and social assistance to grandparents who have had to assume the primary responsibility for their grandchildren; the developing of specific economic data on the economic status of older persons, particularly the economic security of older women; and addressing the needs of those older persons who are involved in forced migrations, becoming internationally or internally displaced refugees.

3. Because 70 per cent of the world's population 60 years of age and over will be living in developing nations by 2025, a focus of the second World Assembly

must be on policies and programmes linked to issues of social and economic development, including participation by civil society and non-governmental organizations. We believe failure to do so would undermine a new plan of action. We urge not only recognition of this but also call for consideration of ways in which support — financial, technical or other — can assist in translating the plan into action for developing nations. We look to partnerships between Governments and civil society to help achieve the objectives of the plan in both developing and developed nations. We further urge that in adopting a new plan of action on ageing, Member States recognize the importance of the plan by mandating national reports to enable monitoring progress on the implementation of the plan.

Increasing longevity is a central issue for the second World Assembly on Ageing, with women outnumbering men as chronological age increases. The oldest old are predominantly women. In much of the world, women are likely to be the poorer gender of the oldest old and victims of discrimination. Member States must address these conditions and formulate plans and programmes to be presented at the second World Assembly on Ageing.

4. Finally, we believe in the importance of holding a simultaneous, proximate NGO Forum to complement the World Assembly, similar to events held in Istanbul and Copenhagen, during Habitat II and the Social Summit. Additionally, we believe that the participation of credentialed NGO representatives during the second World Assembly on Ageing is critically important. Therefore, we respectfully request that provision be made for the voices of older persons, as well as young people, to be heard by those who will have the responsibility for framing and developing the substance of the new plan. To the extent that the 2002 plan of action on ageing reflects the views and priorities of a wide spectrum of individuals from around the world, it can become a blueprint for "a society of all ages".